

Gang-gang

May 2009

Newsletter of the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc.

May meeting

7:30pm Wednesday 13.5.2009

Canberra Girls Grammar School corner Gawler Cres and Melbourne Ave, Deakin. The meetings are held in the Multi-media Theatre at the School. Enter off Gawler Crescent using the school road signposted as Gabriel Drive. If that car-park is full, enter using Chapel Drive.

The short presentation will be by **Dan Mantle** on “**Seabirding from Sonne-rise to Sonne-set**”. This will be a brief report of the seabirds observed (**Bosunbirds, Boobies, Frigatebirds, Petrels, and Shearwater**) aboard the RV Sonne as part of Geoscience Australia's 2008 marine surveys off WA.

The main presentation will be by **Anastasia Dalziell** on “**Making a song and dance about it: mimicry and complexity in the display of the Superb Lyrebird.**”

Anastasia is a PhD student at BoZo at the Australian National University. She has worked on the vocal displays of **superb fairy-wrens, purple-crowned fairy-wrens, white-browed scrub-wrens, the Central American banded wren** and humans.

Everyone welcome

What to watch out for this month

After the rain over Easter and the cold spell that swept through on the Anzac Day weekend, it's hard to remember that it was still hot and dry at the end of March. I was reminded of this when I reviewed my report of the Bumbalong weekend, written only four weeks ago, but what seems now like aeons ago. Consistent with this major change, the species pattern in my garden has also changed significantly, with the **Silvereyes** and **Red-rumped Parrots**, so conspicuous for over a month, having pretty much departed and also, surprisingly, hardly a **Striated Pardalote** either in my GBS site or on Cooleman Ridge. April is usually a good time to see flocks of this species, often mixed with **Spotted Pardalotes**, moving through.

My assessment of the outwards migration is that it has been another season of lower numbers for many species, with again hardly any **White-throated Needle-tails** or **Fork-tailed Swifts** passing through, probably due to the lack of fronts or local thunderstorms up to early April. Numbers of the **Noisy Friarbird** also seem to have been very low. Coming to the end of April the autumn migration season will be nearly over. Most **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** will have departed, and from the reports on the chat line (and my own observations) it seems to have been another below average migration season, particularly compared with numbers 10 or so years ago. There were reports of some large flocks moving through on only a couple of days after Easter when we had the coldest overnight temperatures. While there may still be some movement, any remaining flocks should be predominantly **White-naped Honeyeaters**. **Red Wattlebirds**, which usually migrate in very visible and separate flocks, also have not been prominent, though I did see some being blown through on the cold winds on each day of the Anzac Day weekend.

Some species, however, will often stay until about the second week of May, particularly the **Dusky Woodswallow** and **Olive-backed Oriole**. The former species in particular has been the subject of reports and some exchange of correspondence on the chat line, including that it seems to be overwintering in in-



Spotted Pardalote
(*Pardalotus punctatus*)

Photo by Julian Robertson

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What to watch out for (continued) creasing numbers. Staying over winter in small numbers is also not unusual for some other migrants, depending on the weather. Examples are **Yellow-faced** and **Fuscous Honeyeaters**, **Grey Fantail**, and **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike**.

While quieter than from spring through to autumn, winter can still be a rewarding time in Canberra for bird watching. I find that a walk early to mid afternoon, particularly if still and sunny, can often be more rewarding than the colder early morning. Of the birds that move into Canberra over the autumn/winter period, **Scarlet Robins**, **Eastern Spinebills** and **White-eared Honeyeaters** seem to have arrived in good numbers, more so, at least from my observations, than **Golden Whistlers**. **Flame Robins** have also been regularly reported, and from early indications there seem to be more in my local patch than in the past two winters. From now on **Rose** and **Pink Robins** may also be present, with the former much more likely to visit gardens, though numbers have been low in the past two years. The latter has a southern distribution, including Tasmania, as has the **Crescent Honeyeater**, which also visits Canberra gardens in small numbers over winter. The **Swift Parrot** also travels from Tasmania to overwinter on the mainland. Look for this species in the local area where gums are flowering; they are noisy birds while feeding/flying so can be spotted relatively easily, but so far only the occasional sighting has been reported.

Another feature of Canberra winters is the numbers of **cockatoos** which gather in the suburbs, often flying around in large noisy flocks. The past few weeks have seen large numbers of these feeding on the grass such as in the median strips in Manuka/Griffith/Barton, with the **Sulphur-crested** predominating, but with also good numbers of **Corellas**, mainly the **Little** but look carefully (if not driving!) for much more red around the eye and red wash in the throat area for any **Long-billed** amongst them.

Finally it was a pleasure to receive the *2007-2008 Annual Bird Report (ABR)* when the April *Gang-gang* lobbed into my letterbox. As usual I read this summary of the bird life in the ACT very carefully in order to give me a very good feel for what birds occurred, where and when during this period. One of the things that struck me was how some of my impressions of bird numbers in my local patch round NW Chapman/Coolesman Ridge don't necessarily reflect their abundance in other parts of the ACT. This all underlines what I have said a number of times in this column, species that are locally common (or uncommon) don't necessarily reflect their status in the wider ACT.

While I obviously have a strong interest, including the input of data, I had no role in the production of this very important report. So on behalf of you all I'd like to offer congratulations to the whole team involved in another excellent ABR delivered in such a timely manner. I'm sure everyone of us appreciates the time and effort that has gone into it. It shows once again the importance of capturing your observations into the COG database. Remember to do this, so that further reports are an even more valuable and accurate reflection of bird life in the ACT. — **Jack Holland**

Field Trip reports

28-29 March 2009 — Bumbalong Valley campout

One could not have imagined such different conditions compared with those of last November when this outing, wisely it turned out, was postponed due to inclement weather (snow on the hills, and heavy overnight rain which left vehicles bogged on the road) as the seven COG members joined me at the Bumbalong Rd turnoff in clear skies and warm, dry, though still conditions. As we crested the hill our first views of the wonderful Bumbalong Valley, so dry at its broadest part, were rather discouraging, as was the bird life when we stopped on the way at several spots known from previous trips to be prolific. However, as we dropped into our new camp site at the very top of the valley in a grove of very mature ribbon gums *Eucalyptus viminalis*, we were very pleasantly surprised by the obvious active bird life even in the middle of a warm afternoon. After setting up our tents this was soon confirmed by a leisurely stroll along the Murrumbidgee River bank for just a few hundred metres, during which we recorded six species of small **honeyeaters** amongst the trees, together with many other species, the highlights being several **Brown Treecreepers** in the camp site, an immature **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** moving up stream, and a **Superb Lyrebird** calling very loudly, including mimicking other species, a few hundred metres downstream. We had recorded **Pied Currawong**, **Grey Butcherbird** and were about to include **Satin Bowerbird** until we realised all the calls were coming sequentially from the same spot!

Because of the steep hill blocking out the late sun, bird life quietened down noticeably after about 6 pm, and so we moved down to the river to look for platypus and soon found one nearby. Unusually, it was floating on the top of the water for long periods so that most participants were able to get very good looks, including of the eyes, through the

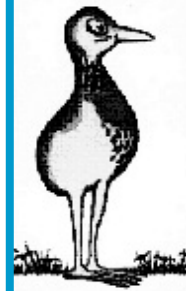
COG scope (another was seen doing the same thing, at least for a short while, the following morning). While the bird life was quiet during the evening (save for a few calls from a somewhat distant **Southern Boobook**), our hosts joined us for a BBQ and together with some of their neighbours we had a very enjoyable evening, including helping to celebrate one of the local's birthday. Some of us also heard the predicted (from the many mature trees with hollows on the hill) **Australian Owlet-nightjar** after we adjourned to our tents.

The very late rising of the sun, not until well after 7 am, allowed us to have a quiet start to the day after the celebrations. While we had already notched up 38 species, we decided we hadn't recorded all the birds on the site yet, and we would have a more thorough search first before setting off back up the road. This turned out to be a very good move, because as the sun rose and warmed up the hill behind us the birds seemed to move out of the ribbon gums and into the dryer steeper slopes covered by apple box/cassinia. During the morning we recorded an estimated 40 **Fuscous** and 15 **Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters**, with everyone obtaining excellent views of these in bright sunshine. Also higher up were about 30 **Dusky Woodswallows** hawking and resting while on migration, and eight quite late **Tree Martins** which preferred to stay put, their diagnostic dark heads clearly visible even from a distance. A couple of **Varied Sittellas** proved more elusive. Later as we moved along very slowly we had great views of a couple of **Diamond Firetails**, a pair of **Scarlet Robins** and several **Speckled Warblers**. Particularly early on, **Yellow-faced** and a few **White-naped Honeyeaters** were funnelling down a small gorge to the river, but by mid morning there was no real migration pattern as small groups were moving either up or downstream.

We arrived back at the camp site after a couple of hours well satisfied with our decision when during morning tea/coffee we first saw a **Whistling Kite** moving downstream and then had great if brief views of the bird of the camp-out, a **Crested Shrike-tit**, after being alerted by its unusual call (which it also repeated while we were watching). As a number of participants remarked, this was virtual "armchair" bird watching. It is a long time since I've seen any site so active, particularly with the recent dry weather.

It was quite late by the time we set off to check a couple of good sites on the road upstream, and though we found 23 species over an hour, including seven not seen round the camp site, bird life was much quieter due to the warm conditions and lack of shade. It was therefore somewhat of a relief to return to the shady camp site for lunch to find much activity still, with **Superb Fairy-wrens**, **White-throated Scrub-wrens**, **Red-browed Finches** etc still moving actively under the trees, not to mention the **Fuscous Honeyeaters** still calling loudly, as they had all day. It was also an opportune time to find a couple of **Restless Flycatchers** and confirm that the female bird consorting with them, which we had seen the night before, was a **Leaden Flycatcher**.

Another non-birding highlight was a couple of the largest male Gippsland Water Dragons we'd ever seen with jaws locked in battle quite oblivious to us on the side of the river. All participants agreed it was a great way to spend 24 hours. The camp site is really special and unique, with the bird life magic. Overall 52 species were recorded within a few hundred metres, of a total of 62 during the weekend. The camp site also has the best facilities of any I have led for COG. We'd like to thank Lynette and Justin once again for allowing us to camp on their property and for being such wonderful and generous hosts. We



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Plains-wanderer weekends

2009 season

14/15 November, 28/29 November
12/13 December 2009
2/3 January 2010

2010

February 2010

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Top End
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all look forward to returning, hopefully when it is less dry and with more time to explore the other parts of this, my favourite valley in the COG area of interest!! — **Jack Holland**

10-13 April — Easter weekend — Weddin Mountains Extended camp-out

There was something for everyone at this year's Easter campout -- fine weather and welcome rain, town and country, birds and mammals, giant frogs, more than a few birds, abounding history, flat plains and gorge dissected mountain, dry-lands and of course the obligatory swamp and sewerage ponds (the 'of course' since Sue Lashko was our leader).

Photo by Julian Robinson



At Ben Hall's Cave

17 or so members and friends stayed at the campground to the west of Weddin Mountain National Park. (This is on the opposite side of the park from the Holy Camp area where banders often visit). The campground is at the base of the mountain looking directly up to Ben Hall's cave, a view offering some encouragement to Margaret to share her knowledge and enthusiasm for this apparently misunderstood and even victimised bushranger.

We set up a comfortable camp with large pit fire, good loos, plenty of space and predominantly good neighbours. Walking sorties from base camp included several around the flat country to the west, starting along the edge where the Callitris/Eucalyptus forest meets the grazing land. Highlights included **Turquoise Parrots, Sittellas, Red-capped Robins, Striped and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters**, unidentified flushed **Quail** (never seen again) and all the expected dry-country cooperative breeders: **Grey-crowned and White-browed Babblers, Apostlebirds and Choughs**.

More history was just down the track at Seaton's Farm, not far past the main **Apostlebird** and **Babbler** hangout. Jim Seaton and his wife set up the farm during the other depression and the well preserved remains are an insightful memorial to the traditional can-do farming spirit. It must have been a rugged time as Jim built very significant buildings using little but flattened corrugated iron, timber and wire. Even an underground storm shelter. Not to mention a beautifully constructed deep well, three km of handmade 1.8m high kangaroo-proof fencing and many sheds, all now nicely rustic as the various pieces of corrugated iron have weathered at different rates into different colours. Plus highly modified farm machinery ... and more. I was musing at one point that they both must have been buggered by sunset, but he then apparently spent his evenings making his own chain wire for the fencing next day.

Other walks headed up the gorges into the mountain. The first took us past the unknown raptor seen high on the opposite cliff perched in a crevice, of which those with keener eyesight and better binoculars could just make out the eye colour. Very useful info indeed when, after much discussion, it turned out to be a rock. At the end of this walk we did confront a perched young **Wedge-tailed eagle** and got spectacular close views as s/he lumbered out past us through the gorge, at that point quite narrow.

The second of our gorge walks provided good views of bush birds including **Mistletoebirds, Golden and Rufous Whistlers, Yellow Thornbills, Double-barred and Red-browed Finches** as well as a couple of Swamp Wallabies. The top opened out to impressive cliff-top views across the agricultural plains and a slightly surprising dozen or more emus grazing below. On the return part of our circular walk we stumbled across a **Common Bronzewing** sitting on its rickety nest just above our heads and later some even closer views of a relatively un-shy Swamp Wallaby.

Our first car outing south to Bimbi State Forest was wet but enjoyable and populated by parrots including **Bluebonnets, Australian (Mallee) Ringnecks** and **Cockatiels**. A longer trip in fine weather took in Holy Camp, Grenfell Sewerage Works, the comparatively bird-free Company Dam and finally The Railway Pub at Grenfell. After the pub a minority stayed longer at Grenfell for *The More Complete Historic Tour* and managed to see Henry Lawson's birth-place and some **Blue-faced Honeyeaters**. Meanwhile the majority en-route back to camp were treated to a spectacular meeting of raptors on Back Piney Range Road. At the one location were great views of **Black Falcon, Brown Falcon, Brown Goshawk, Black-shouldered Kite** and **Nankeen Kestrel**. This was not far from where we'd seen at least five **Wedge-tailed Eagles** 'interacting' earlier in the day. One night stroll and some ad-hoc insomniacal



Photo by Julian Robinson

Turquoise Parrot
(*Neophema pulchella*)

CHANGE OF MONTHLY MEETING TIME

Remember the May Members' meeting will start at 7.30pm NOT 8.00pm.

monitoring picked up calls of **Boobook**, **Owlet-nightjar** and **Bush Stone-curlew** around camp. Also on the night walk were a Giant Banjo Frog (I prefer the name Giant Pobblebonk but not sure which is the official common name) and a Common Spadefoot Toad aka Painted Burrowing Frog.

Our last outing was a tour through Forbes and Gum Swamp on the way home. Special treats included **Pink-eared Ducks** with 5 offspring and an obliging **Peregrine** that allowed everyone a superb view through the scope as well as considerable experimentation in the art of digiscoping - taking variably good photos with the camera held directly against the scope eyepiece.

All up 100 species of birds for the four days. I forgot to mention that I managed to see my **FIRST Barn Owl** on the way in, in the same area as more Giant Pobblebonks were risking it by crossing the road. Thanks to Sue and her advisers for a most enjoyable long weekend. — **Julian Robinson**

Photo by Julian Robinson



At Gum Swamp

15 April — Wednesday midweek walk

Fifteen members commenced the trek from Kambah Pool to Pine Island. While awaiting the arrival of the shuttle drivers, a female **Satin Bowerbird** was spotted, as was the only **Noisy Friarbird** of the day.

On moving off the first of several (at least four) **Scarlet Robins** was heard calling from near the river. A flock of approximately 80 **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** flew upriver soon after, the only migrating flock seen all day. Three **Red-browed Finches** were seen in a weedy gully just before Red Rocks Gorge (and another single bird was seen close to the end at Pine Island). Some of the mistletoe was flowering and appeared to be the attractant for **Mistletoebird** seen on two occasions. Three **Wedge-tailed Eagles** were seen close to the Gorge as was a Nankeen **Kestrel**. These were the only raptors seen on the day: a surprisingly low haul. Just past the Gorge, three **White-fronted Chats** were spotted. A **Little Pied Cormorant** was seen squatting on a rock in the river while seven **Australian Wood Ducks** were the only members of that family recorded. A lone **Black-fronted Dotterel** was investigating the delights of a sand bar. In total we recorded 40 species of birds: not a bad haul considering the strength of the wind in the second half of the walk.

We also had brilliant views of a Platypus swimming in the Murrumbidgee close to the start, and very good views of a pair of Wallaroos hopping around not far from the Red Rocks Gorge viewpoint. — **Martin Butterfield**

26 April — Sunday Morning — Honeyeater migration

The COG outing to view the **honeyeater** migration was held in some of the worst conditions you could want for bird-watching. Despite gale force winds and snow showers on the nearby ranges, two hardy souls joined me on Sunday morning. We headed straight to Tharwa Sandwash, not even bothering to visit the high exposed ridge on Smiths Rd where, on a good day, thousands of honeyeaters will pass through.

However, unbelievably, at the Sandwash the honeyeaters were migrating. In two hours we counted over 400 honeyeaters rocketing through. Blasted by the westerly wind, they came past low and fast in groups of 10-20, barely pausing for breath in the trees and shrubs. About 70% were **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters**, the rest **White-naped**, plus a couple of **White-eared** and a **Crescent Honeyeater**.

In between the showers and wind gusts we were able to enjoy some of the other delights of this spot: a flock of 50 **Red-browed Finches**, intermixed with a few **Double-barred Finches**, **Speckled Warbler**, distant views of a **Brown Tree-creeper** on the north bank, 10 **Dusky Woodswallows**, and the highlight - two obliging **Hooded Robins**, both male, one sub-adult. This stretch of the Murrumbidgee was marked by a dearth of waterbirds, but despite this and the general absence of raptors (only a pair of **Wedge-tailed Eagles**), we recorded 38 species, including a **Tawny Frogmouth** and **Restless Flycatcher** seen on departing. — **Nicki Taws**

Reports from the autumn round of Woodland Surveys (28 March to 5 April)

Mulligan's Flat NR: Jenny Bounds reported that the COG survey team enjoyed fine, mild weather for the autumn woodland survey at the reserve, and a bit of a 'twitch' afterwards to see the **Pied Butcherbird** reported at the large dam site. While some sites were very quiet, there were a number of feeding flocks, some quite large, and a good total of 48 species. Of autumn/winter birds, **White-eared Honeyeater** and **Golden Whistler** were recorded, as were a number of **Scarlet Robins** (the usual increase of birds at this time of year). While the survey failed to achieve three robins at the one site as occurred in nearby Goorooyaroo when Nicki Taws did the survey the week prior, all three robins were recorded at various sites - a **Hooded Robin** pair in the usual area at site 22, a male **Red-capped Robin** near site 5 and **Scarlet Robins** widespread in the reserve. Other highlights included a **Speckled Warbler** at site 4, two sites with **Owlet Nightjars** calling (sites 3 and 4), two parties of **Varied Sittellas**, a pair of **Collared Sparrowhawks** perched in a dead tree and **Pied Butcherbird** at two sites. It was good to find **Common Mynas** absent from the reserve on this survey. Hopefully, once the Sanctuary fence is finished and closed and kangaroo grazing pressure is reduced, we will see the very eaten down ground layer start to recover.

Goorooyaroo NR North: Nicki Taws reported the surveys of northern Goorooyaroo were carried out in fine and still conditions. Interestingly the mistletoe *Amyema pendula* was in good flower attracting numerous butterflies and a few **Eastern Spinebills**. These woodlands don't seem to feature on the honeyeater migration with only a handful of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** sighted, even though there seemed to be many honeyeaters moving through southern Canberra on that day. As is usual for this time of year, the small birds were in large mixed feeding flocks which makes the survey sites either deadly quiet for small birds or frantically busy. These flocks are invariably made up of **Buff-rumped** and **Striated Thornbills**, **Weebills** and both **pardalote** species, with variable additions of **Grey Fantails**, **Scarlet Robins**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, **gerygones**, **Rufous Whistlers** and a few other species. An interesting surprise on one of the otherwise deadly quiet sites was a **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike** dark morph. At the second last site a **Hooded Robin**, **Red-capped Robin** and **Scarlet Robin** all within the site (plus **Speckled Warbler**) was a highlight.

Goorooyaroo NR South: Steve Holliday and Prue Buckley reported beautiful, sunny conditions for their survey. Total species count was a quite low 34, but there were some interesting records for the survey area. Site 1 (nearest to Horse Park Drive) had two **Diamond Firetails**; very occasionally this species is seen in the central and northern parts of the reserve, but not so often at that site. Two **Southern Whitefaces** were with them; these are probably residents but never easy to find. Also seen were three **Dusky Woodswallows** and at least six **Willie Wagtails**. Elsewhere most interesting records were **Scarlet Robin** heard at sites 7 & 9 (few woodland survey records from southern part of Gooroo), **Mistletoebird**, **Golden Whistler**, **Grey Butcherbird**, and **Eastern Spinebill**. Absent were raptors (they usually get **Wedge-tailed Eagle** or a **Kestrel** at least) and almost no evidence of honeyeater migration, apart from three **Noisy Friarbirds** flying north together. There were a few **Grey Fantails** around but nothing like numbers reported elsewhere recently.

Mt Majura NR: Kathy Walter reported that she and John Goldie found many of the sites were particularly disappointing. In sites where they had normally seen numbers of **Buff-rumped Thornbills**, **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, **Superb Fairy-wrens** and **Speckled Warblers**, there was nothing. The noticeable absence of small birds was quite marked in all nine sites. There was still the same numbers of larger birds although in one site they counted seven **Common Brozowings**, which was unusual.

Newline Woodland: Sue Lashko also surveyed on a beautiful morning, starting very impressively with a **Wedge-tailed Eagle** roosting in the front paddock. Other highlights included finding two **Brown Treecreepers**, one in the front (eastern side) paddock and the other in the paddock south of this opposite the dump. There were still a number of migrants including **Grey Fantails**, a pair of **Olive-backed Orioles**, **Dusky Woodswallows** mobbing firstly a **Little Eagle** and then a **Whistling Kite**, several **Grey Butcherbirds** and **Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike**. One **Peaceful Dove** called from the front paddock but the surprise bird of the morning was a lone **Rainbow Lorikeet** in the back paddock - perhaps one of the Queanbeyan birds. There were also 2 small groups (eight and three) of **Double-barred Finches**, including young birds.

Majura Field Range: Barbara Allan and Paul Fennell reported a smidgin of faint Hebridean mist lasting until about 8.30 at their sites. It was overcast and still for a while, but around 9.30 a strong breeze got up which made visual and aural recognition difficult. The main ecological feature was the plague of kangaroos. Paul added that he had been surveying there off and on for 10 years, and this year they are in genuine plague proportions. Even serrated tussock is gnawed to ground level. Every female appears to have two offspring at foot, and he believes the estimate of 9,000.

Highlights were few and far between on this survey, with four **Hooded Robins** and one **Red-capped Robin** being the only real things of interest to report. There were no **Brown Treecreepers** spotted. Little brown birds were notably absent, with only a few **Buff-rumped Thornbills**. One **Scarlet Robin** was heard near one site, and some female Scarlets were spotted in between sites at the southern end.

Jerrabomberra NR woodland: Jenny Bounds with Alison Rowell reported that while the sites themselves were fairly quiet, a large feeding flock between sites had four **Willie Wagtails**, a **Scarlet Robin pair**, several **thornbills**, **Weebills**, **Speckled Warblers**, **Silvereyes** and **Rufous Whistler**. Other highlights in a total of 34 species were several **Olive-backed Orioles** moving through and both **gerygones** still present. There were no migrating **honeyeaters** and the usual **Common Mynas** were absent from the area (possibly due to the dry conditions).

Callum Brae NR: - Jenny Bounds and Alison Rowell did the survey in cool conditions, an overcast sky and some light drizzle late in the morning, but this did not seem to have an impact on birds recorded. Highlights of 36 species: a **Painted Button-quail** at one site on the eastern side, 10 **Diamond Firetails** (all adults), 10 **Dusky Woodswallows** and a flock of eight **Varied Sittellas** between sites. Like the Jerrabomberra woodland the day before, no migrating **honeyeaters** and no **Common Mynas** were recorded. The flock of **Diamond Firetails** was feeding on fallen Panicum seed, a late summer native grass with small millet like seeds (Hairy Panic is the common name). The ground layer in parts of Callum Brae (eastern slopes looking down to the Monaro Highway) is in poor condition with overgrazing (rabbits and kangaroos) evident.

Red Hill NR: Harvey Perkins and Stuart Harris did the Red Hill survey in good weather, not anticipating much, but in the end it turned out to be one of the best surveys on record. In terms of number of individuals it produced the highest count ever at something over 500 birds largely due to the very numerous **Pardalotes**, both **Spotted** and **Striated**, but also several flocks of migrating **YFHE**, lots of **King Parrots** (ca 60), and a decent number of **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos**. But the species variety was also good. Several mixed feeding/migrating flocks made all the difference. In addition to the pardalotes there were **Grey Fantails** (ca 25), a couple of **Golden Whistlers**, a male **Rufous Whistler**, a pair of **Scarlet Robins**, a single female **Rose Robin** (first for the site), **Buff-rumped** and **Yellow-rumped Thornbills**, a couple of **Speckled Warblers**, a few **Red-browed Finch**, **Weebills**, half a dozen **Noisy Friarbirds** etc. Site 4, normally a fairly uninspiring site, was crawling with both species of **pardalotes**, from the top of the canopy to the smallest briar, and also provided both **thornbill** species, the **Scarlet Robins** and one of the **Speckled Warblers**. On the other hand, **fairy-wrens** were noticeably absent, with only a single call recorded, and only a single **Red Wattlebird**. **Common Mynas** were also absent this time (must be the first nil record for a while).

Kama Woodland (Central Molonglo): Chris Davey reported a good morning at Kama despite once again being locked out; still the walk warmed him up. It was a slow start with overcast conditions but the sites improved as the morning progressed. There was nothing very special but one site in particular was excellent with **Southern Whiteface**, **Scarlet Robin**, **Varied Sittella**, **Golden Whistler**, **Brown Treecreeper** and **Diamond Firetail**. All summer migrants (**Dusky Woodswallow**, **Tree Martin**) had gone but masses of **Red Wattlebird** and **Striated** and **Spotted Pardalotes** and a sprinkle of **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** were passing through. Kama is now part of the Canberra Nature Park and though access is still difficult, a carpark and signage is in the process of being provided thanks to the usual end of financial year surplus.

Campbell Park woodland: Alison Rowell reported good conditions, but birds were few. The ground layer has been heavily grazed by kangaroos, rabbits, hares and sheep (a small flock has been in the reserve for years). A lot of dead wood has fallen in the last year, and tree health is not good in parts. A number of large Yellow Boxes have died recently. Woody weed control has left little cover for **finches**, **wrens** and **Speckled Warblers**, and none of the dams contained water. The mistletoe was doing well, which might have been why there were a number of **King Parrots** about, and a lone **Eastern Spinebill**. There were no other honeyeaters, even though the survey finished quite late.

Castle Hill Woodland: David McDonald reported conditions for his survey were atrocious: cold, wet underfoot from the night before, thick cloud and moderate plus wind. There were hardly any birds and, for the first time in over 20 years surveying there, at one sub-site he recorded no birds whatsoever! There were no migrating **honeyeaters** and almost no small insectivorous birds. The whole area has been hammered by drought and sheep. All the palatable grass and other understorey plants have been eaten to the ground with just a few tussocks left. Large expanses of bare earth can be seen. The Blakely's Red Gums are intensely stressed, with many dead and many having a carpet of dead leaves below what should be the canopy. Large areas that used to be so thick with trees large and small that you could not see through are now like open parkland. — **compiled by Jenny Bounds**

Committee news

- The latest Gungahlin community news *Gunsmoke* featured a front cover photo of the **Superb Parrot** and an article; this goes to around 16,000 households and businesses in Gungahlin and is very good publicity for the parrot.
- Jenny Bounds attended the launch of Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2020 and COG may provide comments.
- The autumn round of woodland surveys has just been completed. The Management Committee met on 19 March to discuss the 10 years' data analysis project; this is now being implemented, the first steps being discussions with the statistician and arranging the data dump. One of the mini projects arising from the analysis will focus on the ground feeding guild of birds (drought and overgrazing impacts etc). Other topics will be determined when the trend graphs are available.

— Susan Henderson

2009-2010 subscriptions

Subscriptions for all members fall due on July 1, 2009, unless your mailing label indicates otherwise. If in doubt, contact Sandra Henderson (contact details on back page).

Membership rates have been left at the same level as for the past few years - \$35 for individuals or families. A subscription form appears in this issue, with payment instructions. There is also a form on the COG website <http://www.canberrabirds.org.au>

Please ensure that if you pay by EFT you identify yourself in the payment details, and also notify the Secretary that you have paid in this way (email cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au). If any of your details have changed, please submit a membership form with those changes.

Prompt payment ensures you don't miss any issues of *Gang-Gang* or *Canberra Bird Notes*, and assists in maintaining a healthy financial situation for the Group.

Future Field Trips

The Guidelines for the conduct and advertising of COG field trips are published on the COG web site. Both trip leaders and members/participants should familiarise themselves with these guidelines. In particular, the Registration Form should be completed for each field trip.

Saturday 16 May - Botanic Gardens - Bush birds for beginners

This morning walk will be the first for 2009 aimed specifically at helping beginners and new members identify birds and to learn about their behaviour and calls. The Botanic Gardens are especially suitable for such an outing, as they allow the opportunity to observe a range of local bush birds in a variety of habitats. Due to the available food supply they are also a relative haven for birds during late autumn/winter. Anthony Overs will lead this outing, which will consist of a stroll through this lovely part of Canberra for a couple of hours from 9.15am, meeting at the bus shelter. Please book your place with Anthony (6254 0168, or anthony.overs@gmail.com), who will be happy to discuss whether this outing is suitable for you. Please also don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide.

Wednesday 20 May Midweek Walk

The May midweek walk will be to Mount Majura, hopefully finding some **Glossy Black-Cockatoos**. Meet at 9am at the car parking area on Mackenzie St between Grayson and Burrell Sts.

Sunday 24 May - Molonglo Valley 'Finch Central' - morning walk

Martin Butterfield will lead a walk to this now popular spot in the valley. Great chance of seeing **Flame Robin, Red-capped Robin, Diamond Firetail, Red-browed Finch** and **Double-barred Finch**. Also a good spot for raptors. Please contact Martin on 6238 2637, 0435 012 840 or martinflab@gmail.com.

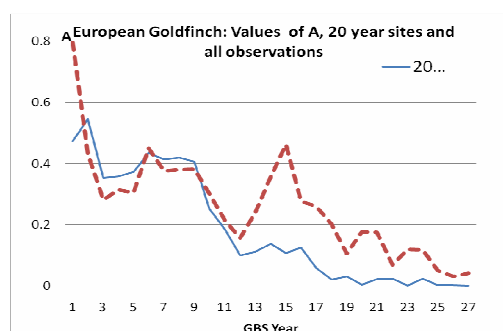
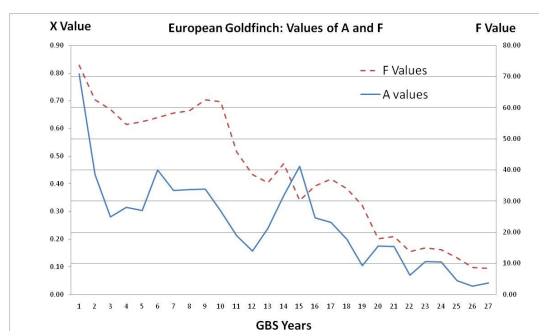
Garden Bird Survey Notes

Some GBS-relevant highlights from the chatline for the last few days of March and (most of) April include:

- **Wedge-tailed Eagle, White-throated Needletails and Common Bronzings** overflying a hard working al-fresco cook in Turner;
- **Little Friarbird** in Queanbeyan;
- Many reports of migrating **Yellow-faced Honeyeater** and **Dusky Woodswallows** and others (including **Brown-headed Honeyeater** in Rivett);
- **Rufous Fantail** adding to a garden list in Giralang;
- **Gang-gang** breeding record (a Gang-gang gang?) in Watson;
- The first record of a **Flame** (or other sort of) **Robin** from a site in Duffy.

Return to the Gold(finch) Standard?

In compiling my column for our local newsletter I used this species as bird of the month for February. I was astonished to see how much it had declined. The graph on the left shows this to be evident for both A and F. That on the right shows the pattern is broadly similar whether looking at all observations or the subset of 16 sites that have reported for 20 years or more.



A similar pattern – of a dramatic decline when comparing the 2008-09 round of surveys with the initial set from 2000- is evident in the Greening Australia surveys of revegetation sites.

Applications of GBS data

Data on **Koels** and their potential hosts in this area were provided to a researcher at ANU. Preparations commenced for providing some further data to the ANU PhD researcher concerned with **Common Mynahs**.

GBS Redevelopment

Our contractor has commenced her work on the redesign. — **Martin Butterfield**

6-8 June - South Coast - long weekend campout

We are still looking for someone to lead the June long weekend trip to the south coast. It was suggested that a trip to the Moruya and Narooma areas would be suitable. The area was the subject of discussion on Birding-aus recently, with the following places suggested to visit:

- Rainforest walk north of Narooma - Catbirds
- The trails, roads and logging tracks behind Tilba
- Long Swamp (Old Tilba Road)
- Bermagui State Forest
- Blackfellows Beach - just north of Potato Point, a sandspit which you can walk to for waders, shorebirds, Little Terns
- Brou Lake - waders, shorebirds
- Wagonga Inlet, Narooma - north side of channel - waders, shorebirds,
- Nungudga Lake - shallow water birds

- Ioso Beach/Tilba Lake - shore-birds, Hooded Plovers.
- Wallaga lake entrance - Shore-birds, migrants, waders, Hooded Plovers and Little Terns on beach.

If this is your patch and you'd like to show people the birds of the area please get in touch with Anthony Overs on 6254 0168 or anthony.overs@gmail.com.

Sun 5 July – Local nature park – Morning

We are looking for someone to lead this outing. Please contact Anthony Overs on 6254 0168 or anthony.overs@gmail.com if you have any suggestions.

Whimsy No. 71 Competition Result

Sad to say there were only two entries in the competition, and only one additional e-mailed comment, thus confirming the author's claim to having three regular readers (see para. 1 of Whimsy No. 71)

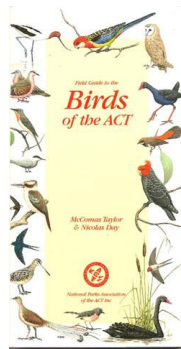
Our President's entry was disqualified as he replied direct to the author, not to the Editor as required by the rules of the competition; and David McDonald also dipped out because, like the President, he picked up an inadvertent mistake – not a deliberate one – a missing possessive apostrophe!

In truth, there were no deliberate mistakes. The Editor needed to fill a small space and that was the best he could come up with at that time of night! After all, it was close to April Fool's Day, and as Gareth Evans once said, pleading the stalker's defence, "It seemed like a good idea at the time., M'Lud".

Apologies to anyone who pored over the article searching for an error — especially the author who complained to me that it "... is driving me mad. I'm sick of rereading the wretched article!" before I put him out of his misery and let him in on the secret.

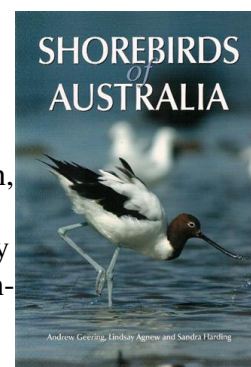
All complaints to gramsay@actewagl.net.au

COG SALES

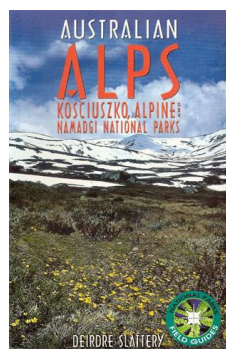


Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT (Taylor & Day) - \$16.00 — Bird identification in the ACT has just become much easier! Here are all the birds of the ACT in colour, with easy-to-follow text and key biological data, in a compact field format that will fit easily in your pocket.

Shorebirds of Australia (Geering, Agnew & Harding) \$33.00 — This title brings together the latest information about the evolution, ecology and behaviour of shorebirds and how they are distributed in Australia. This is a highly sought after title in the popular "CSIRO Publishing" series.



Field Guide to the Orchids of the Australian Capital Territory (Jones, Egan and Wood) - \$33.00 — Orchids can be found throughout the ACT, in nature parks, urban reserves and in Namadgi National Park. They can be beautiful or bizarre; some look like ducks or spiders, others grow long beards or have delicately hinged appendages. This guide's handy size makes it suitable for use in the field.



Australian Alps: Kosciuszko, Alpine & Namadgi National Parks (Slattery) - \$16.00 — This guide is your key to the secrets of the three national parks that stretch over Australia's spectacularly beautiful rooftop - Kosciuszko in New South Wales, Alpine in Victoria and Namadgi in the Australian Capital Territory. Ideal for field trips, this guide will make a wonderful memento as well as a great reference for future trips.

Watching Wildlife (Chris) - \$24.00

Why Don't Woodpeckers Get Headaches? And Other Bird Questions You Know You Want To Ask (O'Connor) - \$13.50

CD: Bird Calls of the ACT (Fullagar & Slater) - \$12.00

LIMITED STOCK: Messent Bird Calendar 2009 - \$8.00

All these items (and more) plus COG T-shirts and Polo shirts are available at the monthly meeting sales desk

Avian Whimsy - No. 72 — Part 1

An Australian Bird Book: 101 Years On – Leach and Morrison, heroes for our time

2008 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Crosbie Morrison's revised version of John Leach's *An Australian Bird Book*; in turn that came fifty years after the publication of the original, in 1908. I found I couldn't do even rudimentary justice to the story in just one *Whimsy*, so herewith a first – a bipartite *Whimsy*! It was probably the first general field guide to Australian birds, and while it looks pretty rudimentary to our spoiled eyes, it was all that our fore-birders had to work with until Neville Cayley's much more famous *What Bird is That?* in 1931. The original version was not comprehensive, only including birds found in Victoria. Subsequent editions somewhat awkwardly rectified that, starting with tacked-on supplements.

Leach was a Victorian country school teacher who began work in 1890, and dedicated his life to education (later focussing on adult education) and natural history. In addition, he had the scientific rigour to do a D.Sc. in 1912 on the muscle structure of **Currawongs**, a work regarded as of international standard at a time when cultural cringing was a national pastime. (The other part of his thesis work involved revising the taxonomy of Victorian lampreys!) He was responsible for making natural history an integral part of the school curriculum, designed the course, and was responsible for training the teachers. Perhaps most lastingly he founded the Gould League of Bird Lovers, for a long time a significant contributor to the causes of natural history and conservation in Australia. He was an important member of the influential Victorian Field Naturalists, president of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, and editor of *Emu* for 10 years from 1914. In the 1920s he was doing natural history broadcasts on Melbourne ABC radio, and it is a source of immense disappointment to me that a planned book of those scripts remained unpublished when he died, far too soon, in 1929.

Crosbie Morrison was of the next generation of Australian naturalists, a natural heir to Leach, and one who also seized the opportunities of the media, especially radio, to spread the indivisible messages of nature appreciation and conservation. As a passionate Darwinian, his career in zoology in the early 1920s at Melbourne University was stellar; for a while he worked as a marine biologist before joining the Melbourne *Argus* as a reporter. Under the editorship of the great Alec Chisholm he took over the paper's natural history column, as well as being a senior political writer and editor. In 1938 he was head-hunted by Sir Keith Murdoch to edit the new six-penny *Wild Life* magazine, for which he also mostly wrote under various *noms-de-plume*. To publicise it, he got agreement to do six weekly radio broadcasts, at the 'dead' time of 6pm Sunday; within a month he had a major cult following and five years later 78% of Victoria's radios were tuned to him! The next year he was being heard throughout Australia and New Zealand, and then in South Africa. Troops during and after the war loved the distraction of his lectures and films on nature. As chair of the National Museum of Victoria he involved the public through weekly public lectures. He deserves pages, not mere sentences (and not just because he's something of a hero and inspiration to me, who of course never met him – I think he is one of the great Australians). As a founder of the Victorian National Parks Association he was instrumental in successfully pushing for state National Parks legislation; his reward was the directorship of the new National Parks Authority. The work and challenges were intense, and he didn't give up his other work, including regular ABC school broadcasts. There is little doubt that, with his already high blood pressure, these extra stresses effectively killed him of a brain hemorrhage only a few months later, in 1958, the same age as the century, and a year younger even than Leach had been when he died.

I'm not sure who asked Morrison to do the revision of *An Australian Bird Book*, though the wonderfully fiery conservation-oriented introduction is written by Charles Bryant, for 30 years the sometimes controversial editor of *Emu*.

Of the artists however, I can find nothing. The first one's illustrations comprise something of hotchpotch including some pictures from Gould, a few by "C.C. Brittlebank, the well-known naturalist-artist", and the remainder by Miss Ethel M. Patterson. It notes that they were painted from museum specimens, and I fear that in places it shows. The 1958 version is much more uniformly – and competently – illustrated, by Anne Lissenden, of whom I can discover only that she also painted for other bird books. I'll see what I can find before next month's finale, where we'll delve into the books themselves. Stay tuned for the next exciting episode ...

— Ian Fraser ianf@pcug.org.au

For sale — Binoculars

Bushnell Excursion 10 x 42,
excellent condition.
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NEW MEMBERS

COG welcomes the following new members:

E Cole, Cook

H Dowsett, Queanbeyan

NEXT NEWSLETTER

May deadline

Wednesday 297 May 2009

Please send, articles, advertisements, updates etcetera to the Editors at gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au or c/- The Secretary COG, PO Box 301 Civic Square, ACT 2608

Articles should be less than 500 words (300 for reports of 1-day field trips; except by prior arrangement with the editor.

Photographs (prints or electronic) with or without articles are encouraged and welcomed.

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Newsletter distribution
Judy Collett and helpers

COG membership

2008-2009 memberships:

- Individuals, families and institutions: \$35
- school students (under 18): \$17.50.

Membership inquiries—

Sandra Henderson ph 6231 0303
membership@canberrabirds.org.au
for changed address or other details

Canberra Birds Conservation Fund
Donations to this fund are tax deductible. Funds are used to support projects that protect and enhance native birds and the environments that sustain them.

COG website

www.canberrabirds.org.au

Office

COG no longer maintains an office. For all enquiries or access to COG's library phone Barbara Allen on 6254 6520

COG E-mail Discussion List

COG has an email discussion list for members and friends: 'Canberra Birds'. Join the list by following the links on the COG website or by sending an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@canberrabirds.org.au with the subject 'subscribe' without the quotation marks

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Gang-gang

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